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Murder suspect changed faces, names

BRIERE JOINED TORONTO IMPROV TROUPE

Montreal police tracing unstable childhood of man accused in death of Holly Jones

ADRIAN HUMPHREYS
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

TORONTO – Michael Briere, the man charged with the murder of 10-year-old Holly Jones, practised an amusing stand-up comedy routine in front of co-workers in Toronto after leaving Montreal when his mother died.

Losing the only parent he ever knew, changing cities and building friendships with new colleagues were all part of yet another self-imposed transformation in the life of Briere.

Born Michel Joseph Leopold Brière in Montreal on Oct. 1, 1967, the man accused of killing the young girl and chopping up her remains has remade himself several times – from plastic surgery to pumping iron, anglicizing his name to making frequent residential moves.

A former co-worker of Briere's, however, said there must have been another quite profound transformation if recent portrayals in the media of a sullen loner are correct.

"He seemed like quite a nice guy at first – witty, easygoing. He had a pretty funny stand-up routine, which he performed for the office once. We even discussed ideas for a skit," said Jonathan Kotcheff, a translator who worked with Briere in Toronto in 1993.

"The sullen, unfriendly, anti-social person being described in the newspapers is not the Michael Briere I knew 10 years ago. That Michael was very open and friendly."

Detectives in Montreal are retracing the unstable childhood of Briere at the request of Toronto police.

Briere was an only child and the product of a tryst rather than a relationship. He was born to a single mother with health problems and never knew who his father was, said André Bouchard, head of Montreal's major crimes unit.

Raised in the working-class suburb of Rosemont, he was a good student.

Although Briere dreamed of becoming an RCMP officer, he apparently hung around with a group of troublemakers.

He may have dabbled in mischief as a youth but has no criminal record in the province, Bouchard said.

Montreal detectives have tracked Briere and his mother to three apartments, with the pair never staying in any of them for more than five years.

For his last two years in Montreal, they lived in a basement apartment on a busy thoroughfare in the city's east end, while he finished a business diploma.

> "He wasn't well liked by many of the women at the office"
> Co-worker Jonathan Kotcheff

The neighbourhood of modest triplexes and three-storey walk-ups is just west of the Olympic Stadium.

"He was some ugly kid," said Bouchard.

Enamoured with the idea of becoming a movie star, Briere had minor cosmetic surgery, pinning back his floppy ears and slimming down his nose. He turned to body-building and dramatically bulked up his modest frame.

"His mom was still alive then. I think that was one of the reasons why he moved to Toronto – she died and he left," Bouchard said.

In Toronto in the late 1980s, Briere hoped to launch an acting career by shifting his interest to comedy. He joined an improv comedy troupe.

His francophone past helped secure a job as a bilingual telemarketer with IBM, working at an office in north Toronto but making calls to Quebec.

"I do remember that he wasn't well liked by many of the women at the office because he was always hitting on them," Kotcheff said.

But not all women avoided him. He dated one woman at the office, placed there by a temp agency. He and another woman spent their lunch hours together playing chess or checkers, Kotcheff said.

Not long afterward, at a Las vegas ceremony on June 22, 1994, Briere married Vicky Lee Bolduc, whom he had met at the improv theatre group, and he soon underwent yet another transformation, she has said.

He abruptly became a "couch potato," and their marriage collapsed within two years under the strain of his obsession with violent computer games and horror movies.

Holly disappeared May 12 and her dismembered remains were found the next day.

Briere was charged with first-degree murder on June 20. Police are still scouring his Toronto home looking for evidence.

NATIONAL POST

Mayors win delay on demerger bill hearings

Talks with Charest and municipal affairs minister leave group 'very, very satisfied'

ANN CARROLL
THE GAZETTE

Quebec mayors have bought a little more time and a promise of help to prepare for parliamentary hearings on the merger referendum bill.

Municipal Affairs Minister Jean-Marc Fournier yesterday said the hearings would be postponed about two weeks, to mid-September, and that citizens would have a clear picture of the costs of opting out of mega-cities long before a referendum register is called.

The compromise appeared to heal the rift between the mayors and the Liberal government over its plan to give citizens a say on the newly merged cities.

"We are very, very satisfied," Sherbrooke Mayor Jean Perrault said yesterday, after a group of megacity mayors met in Montreal with Fournier and Premier Jean Charest.

"The citizens must be well informed before holding registers and referendums, and we were assured of that today," noted Perrault, who heads a caucus of mayors of six large cities: Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Gatineau, Lévis, Quebec and Saguenay.

Montreal Mayor Gérald Tremblay and Longueuil Mayor Jacques Olivier do not belong to the six-city caucus; they have asked for a separate meeting with Charest.

Perrault said residents should know what demerger will cost them before, not after they show up to sign a register asking for a referendum on mergers.

There are no guarantees residents will stick by their mega-cities, he noted, "but at least they will be informed when they are invited to sign a register."

Laying out the costs relative to demerger can only help the ease of the megacities, says Quebec City Mayor Jean-Paul L'Allier.

"I would be very surprised if the people who leave pay less (after demerger) than they did before," he said, noting that taxpayers in breakaway boroughs could be dinged with both local and central city taxes.

Fournier called his meeting with the mayors "constructive" and said there was never a question of withdrawing the merger referendum bill.

"Our commitment to consult the public is shared by all," the minister said. "What we want is real consultation with complete information."

There is no doubt which side of the merger debate the Liberals support, he added.

"We are biased in favour of the new cities, with improvements."

Though mollified, the mayors said they are still unhappy about the Liberal strategy for consulting the public on mergers.

"It's not that we are in agreement," L'Allier said, "but we are talking."

He noted the province will foot the bill for laying out the financial implications of demergers.

"I won't pay for that," L'Allier said. "It's not my consultation project – it's not my law."

Fournier said he would approach the opposition Parti Québécois and Action démocratique about postponing the hearings on Bill 9, the merger referendum bill, to mid-September. The bill could become law by the end of December, he added.

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MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE

Maors (left to right) Yves Ducharme of Gatineau, Jean-Paul L'Allier of Quebec City, and Jean Perrault of Sherbrooke talk to reporters after a meeting with Quebec Premier Jean Charest regarding the demerger law.

Interim successor picked to fill Radwanski post

Privacy commissioner may have bought internal critic's silence: committee source

KATHRYN MAY
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

OTTAWA – Prime Minister Jean Chrétien moved quickly yesterday to restore credibility to the embattled Privacy Commission, appointing a long-time officer clerk of the House of Commons to succeed disgraced George Radwanski.

Robert Marleau will take over as interim privacy commissioner for six months, giving Parliament time to select and screen a new commissioner when MPs and senators return in the fall.

But if the parliamentary committee that investigated Radwanski has its way, the whole process for appointing officers of Parliament will be overhauled to remove the patronage factor.

Marleau, who wrote the rule-book for parliamentarians before retiring in 2000, said his knowledge of Parliament will be critical in stabilizing the agency, which faced serious morale problems even before Radwanski's high-flying lifestyle of lunches and foreign trips was thrown into the public spotlight.

Radwanski resigned Monday, pre-empting the committee's report, which called for the House of Commons and Senate to "unite" and fire him for deliberately misleading Parliament.

The committee's final report cites allegations Radwanski bought the silence of one of his outgoing officials with public cash, an MP said yesterday.

Auditor-general Sheila Fraser will be asked to look into sworn testimony alleging the buyout of a financial officer who was critical of Radwanski's office, the source on the committee said.

"If it's an attempt to cover up maladministration of funds, there are ethical, moral and legal issues there," the source said.

Fraser will also look into allegations Radwanski drew up to $30,000 in cash advances for personal use from his office, in one case to repay a credit card debt.

OTTAWA CITIZEN
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Massicotte named to Senate

Montreal real-estate executive has been a long-time fundraiser for the Liberal Party

ALYSON GRANT
THE GAZETTE

Canada's 1867 Constitution Act stipulates that one have at least $4,000 in "real" property to make it to the Senate.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien needn't worry on that score with his appointment yesterday of Montreal real-estate baron Paul Massicotte, 51, president and chief executive officer of Alexis Nihon Real Estate Investment Trust – the company's portfolio has an aggregate of over 3.6 million square feet of leasable land.

"I'm honoured, very, very honoured by the confidence he (the prime minister) confers on me," the long-time Liberal Party fund raiser said yesterday. "I have lots to learn quickly and only hope I can satisfy Mr. Chrétien."

Massicotte, who said he'd rather focus right now on the honour than the Senate's role in Canadian politics, said he isn't going in with any "major mandate." Instead, he "simply wants to do what's right for Canada."

His business background makes him a natural for related committees, he added, but he's also "very interested in social programs. I'm not an expert in that area, but I want to learn and think I can, very quickly."

He also intends to remain with his company, despite what some might see as potential conflicts of interest given the Senate's role in reviewing corporate, banking, bankruptcy and tax legislation.

> "I'm not an expert in (social programs), but I want to learn."
> Paul Massicotte

Massicotte said he appreciated that the situation could be perceived that way, but stressed that the ethics committee's rules on conflict are "super strict." If you are in potential conflict on something, you have to be "transparent or back off," he said.

One post Massicotte is immediately resigning from is that of lead director on the Bank of Canada's board of directors, which he's held since 1996 when he was appointed by former finance minister Paul Martin.

The appointments yesterday of Massicotte and Percy Downe, chief of staff to Chrétien, are the first of many expected before the PM's February retirement.

Are the appointments payback for favors conferred?

"You'll have to ask him why I was named," he said. "The only thing I know is I have been involved in the party but so have thousands. ... Knowing Mr. Chrétien a little bit, I know I wouldn't be named if I couldn't do a good job."

Originally from Manitoba, Massicotte graduated from the University of Manitoba with a bachelor's degree in administration before becoming a chartered accountant.

In addition to the Bank of Canada, he has served on several boards, including the Canadian Institute of Public Real Estate Companies and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

He resigned in 2000 as a director at Jitec Inc., a Nuns' Island high-tech company that was dogged by scandal involving its founder and former president, Benoit Laliberté.

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IN BRIEF

Quebec, Ontario to talk construction

Quebec has asked Ontario to reopen negotiations over a simmering construction dispute between the two provinces, possibly when Premier Jean Charest hosts a meeting July 8 with Ontario Premier Ernie Eves. An Ontario law prohibits Quebec construction companies from working on public projects in Ontario, and restricts Quebec companies seeking to bid on private construction contracts. The measures retaliate against similar restrictions Quebec placed on Ontario companies.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Police deny reward in Pickton case

VANCOUVER – The man who gave information to police on Robert Pickton was brushed off after trying to claim a $100,000 reward in the missing-women murders. Scott Chubb worked for accused serial killer Robert Pickton starting in 1994, and provided the RCMP with specific information about Pickton and other suspects. Chubb also refuses to testify at Pickton's trial unless RCMP reinstate witness protection for him and his family.

Books on same-sex families approved

SURREY – The Surrey school district, which fought six years all the way to the Supreme Court and racked up $1.5-million legal bill to keep children's books depicting same-sex families off the reading list, has now approved two books that do just that. The books, approved by a committee of parents, trustees, teachers and administrators, will be on the recommended reading list for the kindergarten and Grade 1 family-life curriculum.

ONTARIO

Mummified baby case partly solved

TORONTO – A mummified baby girl found two years ago in a storage locker in an upscale Toronto condominium was hidden by her mother in 1985, police concluded yesterday. The child was found 10 days after her mother, Joanne Patterson, died of cancer. An autopsy failed to determine the date or cause of death, but Det. Mike Stoker discovered that the brand of diaper the baby wore had not been manufactured since 1984.

Pride, gay nupitals converge in Toronto

TORONTO – Wedding bells and newlyweds are to join Canada's largest gay festival for the first time this weekend. Thousands of tourists are expected to celebrate Ontario's legalization of gay marriage and help resurrect the SARS-ravaged hospitality industry. The arrival of the long-awaited right to wed in the province couldn't have been better timed to boost the annual Pride Week celebrations, organizers say.

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